

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 8

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE
6 MAY 1980

Journalists and Spies

A professional journalist does not allow himself to be used by a government agency, be it the Pittsburgh City Council, the Department of Agriculture or the Central Intelligence Agency. There are few editors who would not assent to that principle; certainly we at the Post-Gazette regard it as close to gospel.

But whether a government agency like the CIA should publicly commit itself never to seek the aid of journalists seems to us quite a different question. Recently it has been answered in one way by CIA Director Stansfield Turner, and in another by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Admiral Turner wants to have the option of recruiting journalists for CIA work in extraordinary circumstances, and has admitted to approving such approaches in three instances — none of which was ever brought to fruition. The editors' group wants a blanket and public prohibition against such recruitment. Otherwise, warned New York Times Executive Editor A. M. Rosenthal, "every American correspondent abroad immediately becomes suspect."

The confrontation between the editors and the admiral breaks down into two quite different disputes.

One is factual: Will perpetuation of the CIA's present policy "spook" foreigners, as it were, into regarding perfectly independent American journalists as potential spies? We doubt it. Most of the foreign news contacts relied upon by American reporters can be divided into two categories, those who are sophisticated about American journalists and their characteristic independence, and those who are not. Members of the first group are unlikely to assume, simply because the CIA will not rule out *approaching* U.S. journalists, that the agency will always or even often be successful in those efforts. Nor will these news sources jump to the improbable conclusion that an otherwise trustworthy journalist is likely to be one of the few with whom the CIA was lucky.

But what of the other category of for-

eign news sources, those whose paranoia about the CIA will lead them to exaggerate the scope and success of the agency's involvement with journalists? Are these not the same sort of people who, even if the CIA promised to stay away from journalists, would refuse to take the agency at its word? It seems unlikely, for example, that Iranians, who regard the CIA as the embodiment of evil, would be content with a disclaimer from Turner.

It seems to us that these questions suggest a single answer: that the reputation of American journalists for integrity and autonomy lies in their own, and not Admiral Turner's, hands. But the dispute between the admiral and the editors doesn't wholly turn on practical arguments. The editors also believe that CIA recruitment of journalists is so wrong, so subversive of American traditions, that it ought not to be legitimized in official policy.

But here it seems to us that the editors are confusing their — our — responsibilities and those of the CIA. Editors and reporters committed to the general proposition that journalists oughtn't to do favors for the government have a professional responsibility to foster that principle. But the CIA necessarily operates from different motives: Its proper goal is to further the national security, and it would take a certitude that we cannot summon to say that there are no imaginable circumstances in which recruitment of a journalist wouldn't strike a CIA director as an acceptable, even necessary, expedient.

Whether a journalist approached for such a mission would agree is a different question, though even on this point it is possible to conjure up situations in which even the most Fourth Estate-minded journalist might be tempted to cooperate. Still, the general inclination of journalists is, and ought to be, to remain aloof from such cooperation. And that very principle of separation of press and government seems to us to say that journalists shouldn't ask the CIA to mind our ethical house for us.